

At the request of Mr. REED, his name was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 714 intended to be proposed to S. 649, *supra*.

# STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. SANDERS:

S. 735. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve benefits and assistance provided to surviving spouses of veterans under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, one of my top priorities is to honor the promise that we made, as a nation, to care for veterans and their survivors. The Senate recently passed a resolution, which I was proud to cosponsor, designating April 5 as "Gold Star Wives Day," in honor of the Gold Star Wives of America, a nonprofit organization that provides services, support, and representation for widows and widowers whose spouses died on active duty in the military or as a result of a service-connected disability. We recently celebrated "Gold Star Wives Day," by recognizing the sacrifices of the families of fallen servicemembers and veterans.

In addition to honoring surviving spouses and families, we must take steps forward to provide the comprehensive care and benefits they need. Without a doubt, a decade of war has had a major impact on our military families. Over 6,600 U.S. servicemembers have died in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. They leave behind spouses, who must now face a variety of issues such as financial difficulties, preserving the family home, maintaining the family business, and caring for their children.

Earlier this year, the Veterans' Affairs Committee heard from the Gold Star Wives of America about the significant challenges that survivors continue to face. Among the issues the organization advocated for were improved Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits and qualification requirements. These are some of the challenges that this legislation would address.

This legislation would improve existing survivor benefits and establish a new pilot program to help address the grief counseling needs of surviving spouses. It would also expand health care and other supportive services to children who suffer from spina bifida as a result of their parent's exposure to certain herbicide agents during service in Thailand during the Vietnam War. This legislation would make a real and positive impact in the lives of the approximately 350,000 surviving spouses and children, currently receiving benefits, who have lost a loved one as a result of service to this country.

The Survivor Benefits Improvement Act of 2013 would extend the timeframe

for increased DIC benefits for surviving spouses with children from 2 years to 5 years. A 2001 evaluation of benefits for survivors of veterans with service-connected disabilities revealed that survivors with dependents perceived an approximate \$6,000 annual gap between DIC received and DIC needed. The study also found that the average total household income decreased over \$20,000 on average during the transition period after the veteran's death. As a result of this study, it was recommended that the \$250 monthly increase in DIC payment be extended from two years to five years for surviving spouses with dependent children. It has now been over a decade since the 2001 report and we still have not provided this increase.

Furthermore, a recent survey from the Department of Veterans Affairs indicated that approximately 44 percent of surviving spouse respondents had incomes below \$20,000. It is clear that this legislation is necessary to provide much needed additional support to survivors during the period following a veteran's death, especially for low-income families. We must act to remedy this shortfall immediately.

This legislation would also expand eligibility for DIC to surviving spouses who remarry at or after age 55. The lower remarriage age would ensure that surviving spouses receive benefits at a requirement level comparable to other federal survivor programs. For example, under the Military Survivor Benefit Plan and for federal employees generally, the remarriage age is 55 for retaining benefits.

At present, VA presumes that spina bifida in biological children of certain Vietnam-era and certain Korea service veterans was caused by the veterans' exposure to Agent Orange during military service. As a result, VA provides health care, vocational rehabilitation and employment services, and a monthly monetary allowance to qualifying children. Although Agent Orange was primarily used in Vietnam, it was also used at military installations and other facilities, such as those in Korea and Thailand. Veterans who served in certain occupations at certain bases in Thailand are eligible to receive service-connected disability compensation. Therefore, it is only logical that VA should also be required to provide benefits to the children of veterans with qualifying service in Thailand, who are suffering from spina bifida.

The loss of a loved one is a devastating and life changing event. This legislation would strengthen our dedication to the overall well-being of surviving spouses by providing a pilot program on grief counseling in retreat settings. The program would enable surviving spouses, and dependents in certain instances, to receive the counseling, support, and sense of community necessary to heal from losing a loved one.

We have made a steadfast and unwavering commitment not only to our vet-

erans, but to their surviving spouses and children. This legislation would strengthen, develop, and expand essential programs and benefits for survivors. Veterans and their families, who have both sacrificed so much for this country, deserve these benefits. We must deliver.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 735

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

## SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Survivor Benefits Improvement Act of 2013".

## SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF INITIAL PERIOD FOR INCREASED DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WITH CHILDREN.

Section 1311(f)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "two-year" and inserting "five-year".

## SEC. 3. ELIGIBILITY FOR DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION, HEALTH CARE, AND HOUSING LOANS FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WHO REMARRY AFTER AGE 55.

Subparagraph (B) of section 103(d)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(B) The remarriage after age 55 of the surviving spouse of a veteran shall not bar the furnishing of benefits specified in paragraph (5) to such person as the surviving spouse of the veteran."

## SEC. 4. BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN OF CERTAIN THAILAND SERVICE VETERANS BORN WITH SPINA BIFIDA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter III of chapter 18 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

### "§ 1822. Benefits for children of certain Thailand service veterans born with spina bifida

"(a) BENEFITS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary may provide to any child of a veteran of covered service in Thailand who is suffering from spina bifida the health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance required to be paid to a child of a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from spina bifida under subchapter I of this chapter as if such child of a veteran of covered service in Thailand were a child of a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from spina bifida under such subchapter.

"(b) SPINA BIFIDA CONDITIONS COVERED.—This section applies with respect to all forms and manifestations of spina bifida, except spina bifida occulta.

"(c) VETERAN OF COVERED SERVICE IN THAILAND.—For purposes of this section, a veteran of covered service in Thailand is any individual, without regard to the characterization of that individual's service, who—

"(1) served in the active military, naval, or air service in Thailand, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975; and

"(2) is determined by the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, to have been exposed to a herbicide agent during such service in Thailand.

"(d) HERBICIDE AGENT.—For purposes of this section, the term 'herbicide agent' means a chemical in a herbicide used in support of United States and allied military operations in Thailand, as determined by the

Secretary in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—

(1) SUBCHAPTER HEADING.—The heading for subchapter III of chapter 18 of such title is amended by inserting “AND THAILAND” after “KOREA”.

(2) TABLE OF SECTIONS.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 18 of such title is amended—

(A) by striking the item relating to subchapter III and inserting the following new item:

“SUBCHAPTER III—CHILDREN OF CERTAIN KOREA AND THAILAND SERVICE VETERANS BORN WITH SPINA BIFIDA”; AND

(B) by inserting after the item relating to section 1821 the following new item:

“1822. Benefits for children of certain Thailand service veterans born with spina bifida.”.

**SEC. 5. PILOT PROGRAM ON GRIEF COUNSELING IN RETREAT SETTINGS FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES OF VETERANS WHO DIE WHILE SERVING ON ACTIVE DUTY IN THE ARMED FORCES.**

(a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out, through the Readjustment Counseling Service of the Veterans Health Administration, a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing grief counseling services described in subsection (b) in group retreat settings to surviving spouses of veterans who die while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces.

(2) PARTICIPATION AT ELECTION OF SURVIVING SPOUSE.—The participation of a surviving spouse in the pilot program under this section shall be at the election of the surviving spouse.

(b) COVERED SERVICES.—The services provided to a surviving spouse under the pilot program shall include the following:

(1) Information and counseling on coping with grief.

(2) Information about benefits and services available to surviving spouses under laws administered by the Secretary.

(3) Such other information and counseling as the Secretary considers appropriate to assist a surviving spouse under the pilot program with adjusting to the death of a spouse.

(c) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program at not fewer than six locations as follows:

(1) Three locations at which surviving spouses with dependent children are encouraged to bring their children.

(2) Three locations at which surviving spouses with dependent children are not encouraged to bring their children.

(d) DURATION.—The pilot program shall be carried out during the two-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(e) REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the completion of the first year of the pilot program and not later than 180 days after the completion of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.

(2) CONTENTS.—Each report submitted under paragraph (1) shall contain the findings and conclusions of the Secretary as a result of the pilot program, and shall include such recommendations for the continuation or expansion of the pilot program as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section, the terms “active duty”, “surviving spouse”, and “veteran” have the meanings given such terms in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

By Mr. ROCKEFELLER (for himself, Mr. NELSON, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. BROWN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. KING, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. REED, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. SCHATZ, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. UDALL of New Mexico, and Mr. WHITEHOUSE):

S. 740. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to require drug manufacturers to provide drug rebates for drugs dispensed to low-income individuals under the Medicare prescription drug benefit program; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Medicare Drug Savings Act of 2013. I am proud to be joined by my long-time partner in this effort, Senator BILL NELSON, as well as my colleagues Senator TAMMY BALDWIN of Wisconsin, Senator RICHARD BLUMENTHAL of Connecticut, Senator BARBARA BOXER of California, Senator SHERROD BROWN of Ohio, Senator RICHARD DURBIN of Illinois, Senator AL FRANKEN of Minnesota, Senator ANGUS KING of Maine, Senator AMY KLOBUCHAR of Minnesota, Senator PATRICK LEAHY of Vermont, Senator JEFF MERKLEY of Oregon, Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, Senator BERNIE SANDERS of Vermont, Senator BRIAN SCHATZ of Hawaii, Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN of New Hampshire, Senator DEBBIE STABENOW of Michigan, Senator TOM UDALL of New Mexico and Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE of Rhode Island, in introducing this important piece of legislation.

We need to responsibly reduce our deficit, but taking away health care for seniors and other vulnerable people should be off the table. Rather than dismantling Medicare and Medicaid, we can save billions of dollars by holding drug companies accountable and using the purchasing power of the federal government to negotiate lower drug prices, just the way any private insurance plan would use its purchasing power to lower prices.

That is why we are introducing the Medicare Drug Savings Act. The bill will eliminate a special deal from the 2003 Medicare prescription drug law that allows drug companies to charge Medicare higher prices for some seniors' prescription drugs. It would require prescription drug manufacturers to pay rebates to Medicare for dually eligible beneficiaries in Medicare and Medicaid as well as other low-income Medicare beneficiaries. This proposal would reduce the deficit, saving taxpayers an estimated \$141.2 billion over the next 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Similar proposals were also included in the recommendations from the President's Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, the President's framework for deficit reduction and the President's budget for fiscal year 2014.

Prior to the creation of the Medicare prescription drug program, brand-name

drug manufacturers paid a drug rebate for dually eligible beneficiaries in Medicare and Medicaid. However, when the new Medicare drug program was established, drug companies no longer had to provide these rebates, resulting in windfall profits for prescription drug manufacturers, at taxpayers' expense.

The Medicare Drug Savings Act would require prescription drug manufacturers to pay the difference between the lowest current rebates they are paying to private Part D drug plans, and the percentage of Average Manufacturer Price, AMP, they currently pay under Medicaid, plus an additional rebate if their prices grow faster than inflation. They would be required to participate in the rebate program in order for their drugs to be covered by Medicare Part D.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill. In doing so, we will protect Medicare for seniors, and end a giveaway to drug companies that is costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

## SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

### SENATE RESOLUTION 98—HONORING THE LIFE, LEGACY, AND EXAMPLE OF BRITISH PRIME MINISTER BARONESS MARGARET THATCHER

Mr. MCCONNELL (for himself and Mr. VITTER) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

#### S. RES. 98

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher was born on October 13, 1925, in Grantham, United Kingdom;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher first visited the United States in 1967;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher became the first and, to date, only female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in 1979;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher served as Prime Minister for 11 years, making her the longest-serving Prime Minister in the 20th century;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher in 1982 led United Kingdom efforts to liberate the Falkland Islands after they had been invaded and occupied by the Government of Argentina;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher in 1983 supported the deployment of United States nuclear cruise missiles at United Kingdom bases and the deployment by the United States of short-range nuclear missiles in Europe when there was stiff opposition to her doing so;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher in 1984 survived an assassination attempt by the Irish Republican Army in Brighton, United Kingdom, and declared that “all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail”;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher in 1986 allowed U.S. F-111s to fly from British territory to attack sites in Libya in response to the Berlin discotheque bombing which killed 2 members of the United States Armed Forces;

Whereas Baroness Margaret Thatcher's personal relationship with President Ronald Reagan demonstrated once again that the special relationship between the United